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Farah, Abdulkadir Osman

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Migration and Integration: The case of Somalis in Denmark

Paper presented at Danish-Africa network gathering event at Aalborg University College, 5th of December 2009

By *Abdulkadir Osman Farah*

Abstract

Migration and the movement of people has always been a fundamental part of human society. Humans depend on migrating and been in a constant mobility for a variety of reasons. We know that our economies and livelihoods depend on migration. We could even say that our world cannot survive without migration. Great societies were built on successive migrations. Unfortunately in recent years, migration, particularly the movement of people from the less privileged south to the powerful North, at least in the political and popular discourse represented a source for threatening security challenges.

The term integration is multifaceted and complex and is closely connected to the term of migration. So far there exist no concrete consensus on the definition, understanding and interrelationships between these important concepts. With regard to integration, some scholars and researchers confuse it with the concept of assimilation that refers to the process of transformative steps towards cultural affiliation, understanding and identification.

My own definition and understanding of integration is the following. Integration, which I herewith refer to a positive one, occurs, when an individual who is motivated and committed to social engagement finds and joins a network of people and organizations in an environment of learning and development with a society and system that supports the individual and group's ambitions that contribute to the wellbeing of the concerned society

and the country. This implies certain level of loyalty towards the society and country one voluntarily decides to live and reside.

In this paper I will discuss the integration of Africans, particularly the Somalis into the Danish society. My aim is to nuance the popular debate in the media and the society in general that occasionally focuses on the negative dimensions of the origin, the arrival and the integration of these immigrants. Similarly I will briefly mention the number of serious challenges people confronted and still confront with regard to integration and adjustment into this society. In addition I will analyse on how I think Somalis managed to develop, organise and mobilize despite serious social, economic and structural obstacles. Finally I propose some tentative suggestions for better integration for immigrants of African descent, particularly the Somalis.